

# Chapter Four: Current and Projected Use of the Study Area

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# **Chapter Four: Current and Projected Use of the Study Area**

## **A. Transportation**

The study area is currently reached by air or trail. There are public landing strips at Eightmile Lake and Skwentna and private landing strips at Yenlo Lake, Trail Ridge and Alexander Lake. Gravel bars along the major rivers and the lakes provide fly-in access. Several lakes are used for floatplane landings. Boat access from Anchorage or the Parks highway is possible via the Skwentna, Yentna and Susitna Rivers, and other streams. The study area has limited road access via the Parks Highway and Petersville Road and Oilwell Road. There is also a winter trail connecting Petersville Road to the Shulin Lake area (ADNR, 1985:133).

## **B. Tourism**

The Susitna basin offers a wide range of year-round outdoor recreational activities and opportunities that are considered extremely valuable and important to local residents and visitors to the area. Local residents use the area for recreation, and income is provided from tourism activities based on area recreational opportunities. Recreational opportunities occur throughout the study area and largely involve dispersed recreation. Abundant rivers, streams, lakes, valleys, and numerous trails are actively used for hiking, dog mushing, fishing, hunting, sightseeing, cross-country skiing, snow machining, rafting, boating, camping, and other private and commercial recreational activities. The majority of the recreation and tourism activity within the study area occurs during the summer. However, snow machining and cross-country skiing occur throughout the area during the winter.

The community of Talkeetna is the gateway to Denali State Park and Denali National Park and Preserve. Talkeetna is the staging area for approximately 1,000 climbers each year who attempt to reach the summits of Mt. McKinley. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Talkeetna keeps its mining history alive with renovated trapper and miner cabins used as lodging, shops and restaurants. Popular activities include flightseeing the Alaska Range, sportfishing the Talkeetna, Susitna and Chulitna Rivers; river rafting and jet boat tours; camping; dog mushing; and cross country skiing (ATMC, 2000).

Many visitors to the MSB are Alaska residents. In the 1998, over 404,000 resident Alaskans visited and spent over \$85 million. Tourism supports over 2,100 jobs in the borough. During fall and winter, resident Alaskans enjoy visiting family and friends and outdoor activities, while spring and summer residents visit attractions, sightsee and fish. The top communities visited are Wasilla, Palmer, Big Lake, Willow and Talkeetna (Tourism Trends, 1999).

## **C. Recreational Activity**

The study area contains valuable land for private recreation and year-round settlement. Numerous state land disposals have been offered in the past including Gate Creek, Denali View, Schneider Lake, Nine Mile and Ambler lakes remote parcel areas, and subdivisions at Swan Lake, Trapper Creek/Glen Peters Creek South, and Safari Lake.

### **1. Susitna Basin Recreational Rivers**

The Recreation Rivers Act of 1988 established mile-wide river corridors along the Deshka River and Kroto, Moose, and Alexander creeks within the study area. This Act keeps the recreational rivers in public ownership, identifies purposes of the designation, and provides management intent. Access, commercial uses,

and development within the recreational river areas are controlled through a management plan and advisory board. Limits are imposed on motorized boat access to some portions of some rivers in order to maintain the quality of recreational experience, especially during summer fishing season. Several active placer mines and a few communities are located upstream of these river corridors.

**Table 4.1: Recreation Activities in the Susitna Area:**

Berry picking	Cross-country skiing	Rafting	Camping
Bird watching	Boat launch site use	Kayaking	Boating
Dog sledding	Off-road driving	Flying	Hunting
Rock hunting	Mountaineering	Hiking	Photography
Snow shoeing	Snow machining	Fishing	Biking
Hang gliding	Horseback riding	Canoeing	Wildlife viewing

## 2. Personal Use Sport Fishing

Nonresident hunting and fishing is an important part of the Susitna Valley tourism industry. Several sport fisheries occur within the region, targeting salmon, rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, and others (Howe, Fidler, and Mills, 1995). Freshwater sport fishing occurs in most of the area streams. Particularly popular areas include rivers, streams and creeks in the drainage of the Susitna River. Popular waterways include Lake Creek, Alexander Creek and the Susitna and Chuitna rivers.

## 3. Personal Use Hunting and Trapping

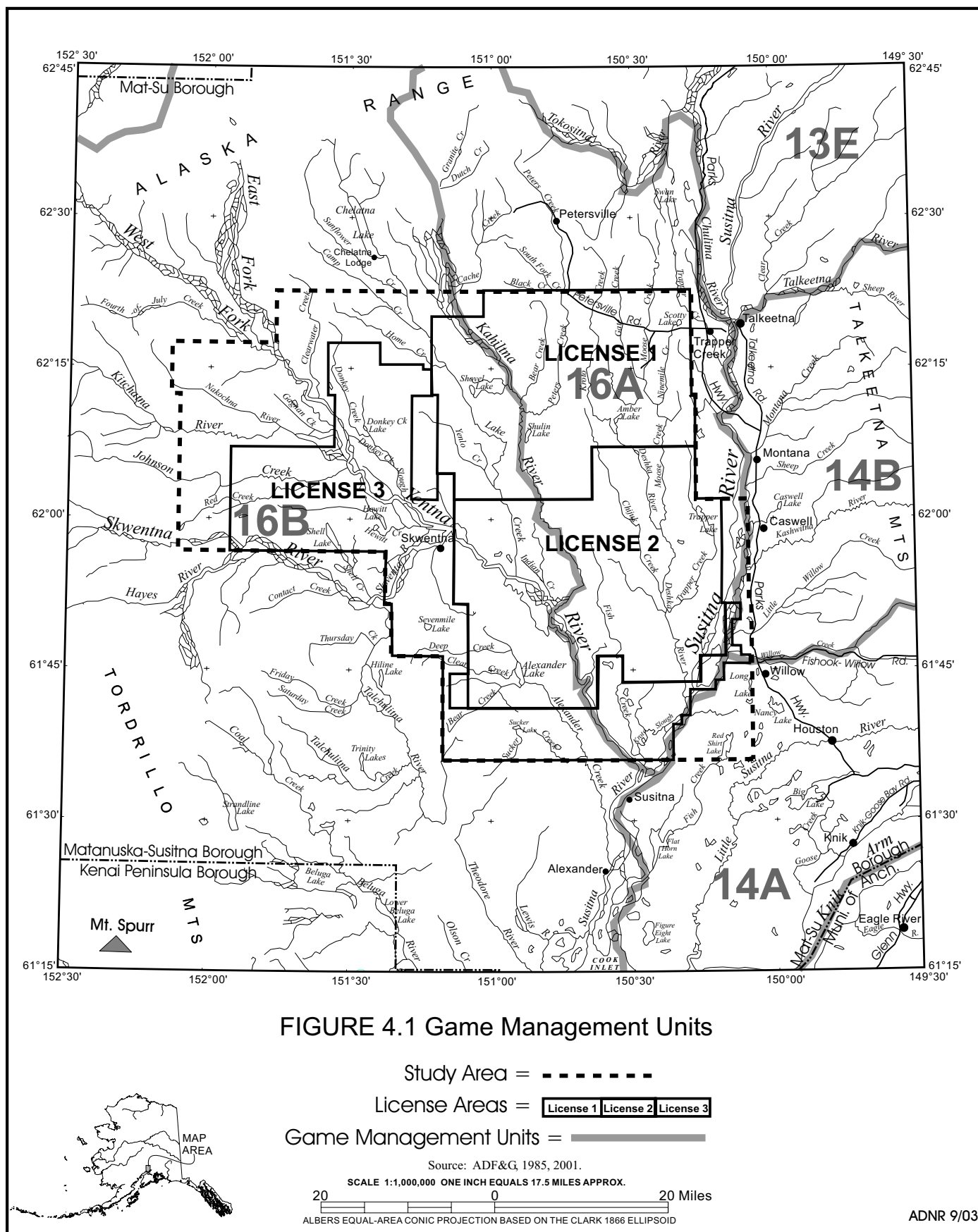
ADF&G controls and monitors the harvest of wildlife through game management units (GMU). The study area encompasses part of two GMUs: 14 and 16. GMU 14 includes the drainage area north of Turnagain Arm and east of the Susitna River (see Figure 4.1). GMU 16 includes the Susitna area west of the Susitna River to the Alaska Range. The Susitna River area is a heavily used moose hunting area. Both black and brown bears are harvested in the study area.

Moose are the most sought after big game animal in Alaska. Hunters report harvesting over 7,000 of Alaska's estimated 175,000 moose each year. Going out to "get a moose" is a fall ritual for tens of thousands of Alaskans. Moose management is designed to maintain productive and abundant moose populations in important hunting areas. Moose are easily managed through regulation of predation, enhancement and maintenance of habitat, and restrictions on annual harvests (ADF&G, 1999 an intro to moose hunting).

## D. Subsistence

The state of Alaska, through the Boards of Fisheries and Game, manages subsistence resources on all lands and waters in Alaska, and the Federal Government, through the Federal Subsistence Board, is responsible for assuring a federal subsistence priority on federal public lands and waters. Both state and federal laws define subsistence as the "customary and traditional" use of wild resources for food, clothing, fuel, transportation, construction, art, crafts, sharing, and customary trade.

Eligibility for subsistence uses differs in state and federal law. Under federal law, only rural residents qualify for subsistence hunting and fishing on federal public lands. Federal subsistence regulations further restrict eligibility only to those rural residents who have a customary and traditional use of a particular fish stock or game population in a particular area. Some federal public lands remain open to use by residents who are not federally qualified subsistence users.



Under current state law, all state residents qualify for subsistence fishing and hunting on state and private lands of those fish and wildlife populations where subsistence use occurs. If non-subsistence uses have been eliminated and the regulatory board has determined that the harvestable surplus of a fish or wildlife population is not sufficient to provide a reasonable opportunity for all subsistence uses, the regulatory boards distinguish between subsistence users and determine eligibility on the basis of (1) customary and direct dependence of the subsistence user on the fish or wildlife population for human consumption as a mainstay of livelihood; and (2) the ability of the subsistence user to obtain food if subsistence use is restricted or eliminated (Haynes, 2000).

Subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping occur year-round, throughout the entire region. Subsistence foods include salmon, other fish, big game, small game, and furbearers. In addition to fish and game, vegetation is an important subsistence resource within the study area. Subsistence use of vegetation includes many types of berries, wild celery, wild rhubarb, and rosehips. Gardening is often overlooked as a means of subsistence, providing cabbage, potatoes, carrots, turnips, and other fresh vegetables. The most important subsistence use of vegetation in the study area is the use of wood as fuel for heating and timber for building.

Salmon makes a large contribution to the subsistence diet. Chinook salmon are thoroughly utilized: the flesh is cut into steaks, fillets, and strips for smoking, while heads, tails, fins, backbone, roe and milt sacks, hearts, and stomachs are processed into a variety of traditional products. Besides chinook salmon, other species of salmon are harvested for subsistence use (ADF&G, 1985b:882). Fishing for coho salmon continues into September. Freshwater fish such as Dolly Varden and rainbow trout are caught throughout the summer from local freshwater streams, using rod and reel (ADF&G, 1985b:881).

Gathering of edible plants such as wild celery, wild rhubarb, and rosehips occurs during the summer. Berries picked in season include high and low bush cranberries, salmon berries, blueberries, and crow berries. Firewood is gathered throughout the year, but wood-gathering activities intensify around October. (ADF&G, 1985b:881).

In September, harvest efforts concentrate on moose. Fall moose hunts frequently combine fishing and gathering activities. Moose is an important part of the subsistence diet. Moose meat is hung in a cool place for aging prior to preserving. Choice cuts and portions of moose are eaten fresh, but most moose meat is stored in freezers (ADF&G, 1985b:882).

Winter is a time of relatively low activity in the annual cycle of subsistence life. Hunting for ptarmigan, spruce grouse, and hare continues through the winter, and trout are caught through the ice. Trapping of furbearers begins in mid-November and continues throughout the winter months. Trapping for beaver continues into March (ADF&G, 1985b:882).

The harvest and use of these foods represent activities with significant social and cultural meaning as well as economic importance, especially within Alaska Native communities (MMS, 1995:III.C.6). Subsistence activities tie the community together and provide group identity and community stability.